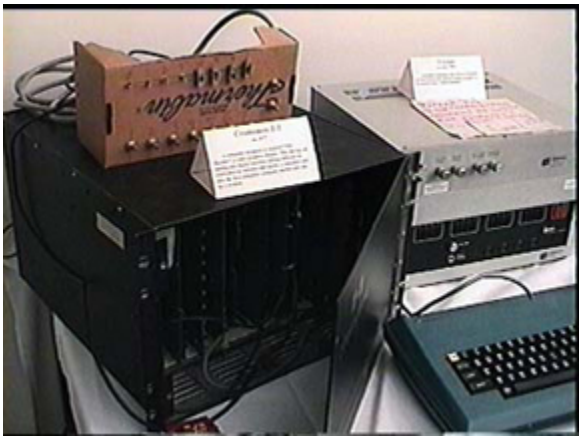
Cromemco Z-2 and CAT 100 Frame Buffer in the Experimental Television Center Studio

Experimental Television Center

In 1979, the Experimental Television Center used a Cromemco Z-2 with a CAT 100 Frame Buffer in the system provided to media artists. The processing system computer was the Z-2, an 8 bit system with an S-100 bus, and dual floppy drives. A CAT digital frame buffer was interfaced to the computer; at the time this was one of the only commercially available "low-cost" digital devices, which incorporated concepts of video, and recordable signal output. For a description of design considerations of Robert Flexer, designed of the CAT Frame Buffer, see "A Building Block Approach to Color Graphics" by J. Robert Flexer and Gio Wiederhold. The Z-80 was interfaced also with the analog box.



Cromemco Z-2 displayed at the conference Video History: Making Connections, 1998.

CROMEMCO was founded in 1974 by two Stanford Students, Roger Melen and Harry Garland, who lived in the CROthers MEMorial Hall dormitory on the Stanford campus. CROMEMCO incorporated in 1976. Early products were cards for the S-100 bus, as used by the Altair and IMSAI computers, which included an Analog-to-Digital converter. Another early product, Cyclops, was an interface for a video camera. CROMEMCO's Computer products were based on the 1976 ZILOG-80 integrated 8-bit processor chip, a development of the architecture of the Intel-8008.

Zilog was founded in 1974 by Franco Zefferelli. Zilog produced the Zilog Z-80 in July 1976, which was also used by Sinclair in the ZX-80, ZX-81 and ZX Spectrum computers, and later the Zilog Z8000. Zilog became a wholly owned subsidiary of Exxon by 1980. Zilog's management and employees purchased Zilog back from Exxon in 1989. Zilog became a publicly-held company in February, 1991. In March of 1998, Zilog was privatised, as a result of the merger by Texas Pacific Group (TPG).

Cromemco's Z-2 system (1977) was an evolution of the Z-1 model. Major change was a new CPU board using a 4 Mhz. Z80 CPU microprocessor. The system, always based on the S-100 bus, proposed 21 connectors for S-100 cards and the ability to provide power to additional peripherals. The front panel didn't offer any switches or control lights. 8080-based software made with the Z-1 model could run on the Z-2 system. The Z-2 kit price was $959 in 1977, while the assembled computer was priced at $ 995.

The Z-2-D (September 1977) version included 64 KB of RAM, one or two 92 KB (then 184 KB) formatted floppy drives and controller card. The Z2-H system (July, 1980) used the Z-2 but included a 11 MB hard disk, two dual sided floppy disc drives and 64 KB of RAM memory.

CROMEMCO computers were encased in cast metal frame. The Cromemco Z-2 was built to address the needs of the industrial market. The Z-2 line was the first commercially marketed microcomputer certified for use by the U.S. Navy for use aboard ships without major modification.

In 1979 CROMEMCO produced the first multi-user operating system for a micro-computer: CROMIX, based on UNIX.

In 1981 CROMEMCO produced systems using the Motorola 16-bit MC68000 processors.

In 1982 CROMEMCO Deutschland was founded to serve the European market out of Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

By 1983, CROMEMCO had approx. 500 employees and about $55 Million/year in revenue. CROMEMCO was a private corporation and was never publicly traded.

In 1987 CROMEMCO was bought by Dynatech.